

Summary of *Jesus's Death by the Spear: The Heretofore Inconsistent Text-Critical Analysis of Matt 27:49b and the Recovery of a Dismissed Variant Reading's Story to Tell*

By Ryan F. Smith

This dissertation examines the scholarly analysis of Matt 27:49b, a textual variation-unit for which the longer reading portrays someone taking a spear and piercing Jesus's side, causing water and blood to pour forth. This occurrence parallels a similar event described in John 19:34, with the main difference being that, whereas the spearing in John takes place after Jesus has already died, it takes place in Matthew just before he dies, appearing to be the ultimate cause of his death. This chronological discrepancy over the timing of the spearing actually serves as a counterintuitive argument in favor of the pre-mortem spearing in Matthew being part of the initial text of that gospel. According to the text-critical canon *lectio difficilior potior*, the more difficult reading is the reading more likely to be the initial text since a later copyist would be more likely to make a difficult passage easier than an easy passage more difficult. Furthermore, the reading portraying the pre-mortem spearing stands uncontested in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, two of the most highly regarded manuscripts extant in terms of transmitting a text believed to be as accurate a representation of the initial text as one can approximate. Finally, to these two factors one can add that no one yet has been able to offer a legitimate reason why Matthew himself could not have authored the pre-mortem spearing in his own gospel. Thus, one finds that the case for the pre-mortem spearing being part of the initial text of that gospel is quite strong.

Yet, as this dissertation demonstrates, only a handful of modern scholars have concluded that the reading containing the pre-mortem spearing is the initial text. As this dissertation also demonstrates, the many scholars who have rejected this reading as such have done so with arguments that have been inadequate, often applying text-critical criteria in a manner very inconsistent compared to their application of the same criteria at other, similar variation-units. As many of the chapters of this dissertation show, scholars have adopted many strategies to explain how the pre-mortem spearing was a secondary addition to the text of Matthew ultimately based on the post-mortem spearing of John. Yet none of these theories have been able to account for the discrepancy between Matthew and John over the timing of the spearing and, since the post-mortem spearing's place in the text of John is undisputed, scholars have rarely considered the legitimacy of the pre-mortem spearing on its own merits. It is not the purpose of this dissertation, however, to argue for the reading containing the pre-mortem spearing of Jesus at Matt 27:49b as the initial text. Nor is it the purpose to theorize *why* scholars have rejected the reading with arguments so inadequate and inconsistent. Rather, the purpose is to show that the *result* of this inconsistently arrived at conclusion of rejection is that the story of the pre-mortem spearing has been misunderstood by if not outright lost to modern scholarship. Regardless of its initial-text status, the pre-mortem spearing has been part of the text possessed by many in the past. For this reason, its story ought to be valued as part of the efforts of modern textual criticism to view the whole tapestry of texts that the church has employed since some of its earliest days.